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ABSTRACT

Senior citizens can support community college humanities programs in three ways. First, they are a resource of potential students and are eager for courses providing them with historical, musical and literary knowledge. Clackamas Community College in Oregon City has responded to their interest by providing non-credit extension courses at every senior citizen center and large retirement home in the district. Courses are developed based on residents' interests, and instructors interested in initiating a new course are often advised to try it out in the retired community. Second, older adults provide younger students with a vital source of information and wisdom which relates theory and practice in the classroom. Clackamas makes use of a Retired Senior Volunteer Program to locate seniors who can explain to younger students their experiences during the depression or in war. Third, seniors can serve as a valuable resource for student projects in history and literature, as students can interact with and interview seniors and benefit from their experiences. Clackamas is planning a project focusing on life in Clackamas County during the depression of 1934. Informants from different communities and occupations have been lined up to record their memories on audio tape. Portland Community College sponsored a student film in which seniors described life on the Willamette River in the steamboat days. The film itself has many educational uses, in addition to demonstrating the benefits of senior involvement. (KL)

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SENIOR CITIZENS AS A COMMUNITY RESOURCE IN THE HUMANITIES

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SENIOR CITIZENS
AS A COMMUNITY RESOURCE
IN THE HUMANITIES

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The present dilemma facing the humanities in community colleges can be helped by including senior citizens to augment curricular development. Senior citizens provide a three-fold aid to the community college humanities program. First, they fulfill the mission of the college to reach out to people of all ages in the district--not just younger students on campus--and provide enriching educational services. Second, they provide on-campus students, especially younger ones under thirty, with a vital resource of living experience and wisdom not found in textbooks or lecture courses. Third, they are a source of vital historical knowledge with which instructors can interest younger students in taking courses in history and literature by having seniors serve as witnesses to the past life of the community.

In the brief time I have been alotted I will describe three programs or resources used by Clackamas Community College in Oregon City, Oregon, which use seniors as a vital part of the curriculum. Parenthetically, Clackamas County lies just south of Portland, Oregon, a half-rural, half-suburban place of 230,000 population occupying a large area. Seniors in the district range from life-long rural farmers, to blue collar workers to retired school teachers to upper class businessmen from the eastern United States. The county has several paper and lumber mills and many seniors have retired from mill work, carpentry and paper making.

Seniors are primarily an audience--an untapped resource of potential students--very eager for courses providing them with historical, musical and literary knowledge. Now that many have the time they express great interest in learning--and I emphasize learning, as opposed to taking exams. We at Clackamas have responded to this by providing non-credit extension courses at every senior citizen center and large retirement home in the district. As part of a regular course load, an instructor visits a senior center and works out a course with the residents depending on their needs. We have found the most interest in local history, religion and music courses. Thus, in effect, regular curriculum courses, minus credit and exams, are partially reimbursed by state F.T.E. money, are well attended. For example, at one retirement home we provide courses in music in which the local symphony program is the curriculum topic; religion, in which Judaism and Christianity are discussed, and a sewing course is also provided. Furthermore, we have found the seniors to be excellent receptors of new ideas and we often test new course ideas and textbooks on them. If an instructor wants to initiate a new course, often he will be advised to go to the retired community and work out details there. Senior reaction always helps smooth out rough spots in the curriculum and comments about new textbooks are most helpful.

Secondarily, seniors represent a golden opportunity to relate theory to practice in the classroom. For example, Clackamas County was the territorial capitol and the seat of the largest Chautauqua on the west coast. We have found that when we discuss recent history or literature that there is at

least one senior who has had a real life experience with that phase of living. Thus, at Clackamas, seniors recall their days during the depression, or in war, or what the first impact of radio or motion picture was on their lives. Younger students are fascinated by real life experience and listen with much more attention than to a theoretical lecture.

At Clackamas we are fortunate in having on campus a fine Retired Senior Volunteer Program so we have access to a wide range of people from many varied backgrounds. We find that finding a senior who was, for example, in the Argonne Forest Campaign in World War I is not a problem. In fact, if one person is found, many more will volunteer. As a personal example, I use seniors in my history course to explain, vividly and graphically, the horrors of Nazism as Jewish victims of the Holocaust. That experience is worth a thousand lectures or a hundred films.

Thirdly, seniors can be a valuable source tool for humanities projects in history and literature by having students interact with and interview seniors to try to benefit from their experiences. These interviews can eventually result in video programs and films to capture a permanent record of a certain era. For example, at Clackamas we are about to embark on a project involving a description of life in this county during the depression of 1934-1940. By using our contacts with seniors we have already lined up many informants--from different communities and occupations who will record their memories on audio tape. We hope to apply for a grant to put some of these interviews on video tape using actual community locations as a background. Memories of people in their seventies or eighties are still fresh and vivid and must be recorded before time takes its inevitable toll.

Another example of seniors as a project resource comes to us from a neighbor institution--Portland Community College. There, inspired by a book on local history by Howard M. Corning entitled "Willamette Landings" students used senior citizens to describe life on the Willamette River in the steamboat days of 1890-1920. The film, "They Hailed the Steamboat Anyplace" goes much further than the book in looking at an era of steam and river transport which, when connected to historic photographs, makes a living documentary that retains an endless fascination, especially for younger students. What is more remarkable is that the narrators were 72, 80 and 94 years of age when the film was produced.

The film presents aspects of senior involvement that we can use as educational examples. First, it presents a picture of a society without automobiles or roads. It shows how rivers were highways for people and crops and how hard it was for farmers to earn a living. The picture shows the importance of Portland both as a market and labor terminal. It also relates the grip and danger of flood both to field and city and how people coped without dams or flood control.

Seniors can tell younger students,as they do in the film, of how local residents had to be self-reliant and interdependent, since ideas such as federal flood control would be thirty years in the future. The older residents can show how local folk were more dependent on nature and nature's wrath, and how one flood could wipe out years of work.

In summation, seniors are an asset to be used as a vital tool in reaching out to all parts of the community. They will add a spark of authenticity and enthusiasm to any humanities course. We at Clackamas have found

our humanities course to be expanding due to the new audiences being developed by using seniors.

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